

## Academy turns out first interns

While other students finished high school in the classroom, Jay County High School seniors Cameron Kunkle and Vernon Goodman spent much of their time working in manufacturing.

They are the first students to have paid internships at FCC Indiana, a clutch assembly manufacturer in Portland, through the school's Manufacturing Academy in its first year.

The academy's goal is to benefit students and manufacturers by training students to have the skills needed to perform manufacturing jobs, said Jeremy Gulley, director of teacher effectiveness for Jay Schools. As the number of manufacturing jobs has increased post-recession and baby boomers have started retiring, it's become more difficult for employers to find enough qualified employees.

On top of those factors, students may not realize the opportunities that are locally available in manufacturing, said Stacie Paxson, human resources manager at FCC.

"They don't have to go to the big cities. They can find a good job close to home," she said.

A good job in the area was exactly what Kunkle knew he wanted.

"My plan wasn't to go to college," he said.

Thinking manufacturing could be a good alternative, he enrolled in the academy to find out more about it.

The Manufacturing Academy brings in speakers from FCC and other companies, like Tyson Mexican Original and POET Biorefining, Gulley said. The companies also bring students in for tours.

The classes helped Kunkle learn about how factories work, but "I got more out of being at the factory," he said. The internship happened in stages, allowing Kunkle and Goodman to gain experience in different types of factory work.

In the first stage, they worked on the factory floor, training with operators to make parts.

"Those parts will go to one of our customers," Paxson said. "They're doing the same work. They are of course having guidance from the individual they're working with out there, the associate, but they're doing the work."

Kunkle and Goodman then worked with quality technicians, learning about different equipment used to test parts. Both of those areas were a bit slow for Kunkle, he said. The hands-on maintenance technician stage was "definitely the best."

Both students have the option to continue the internships into the summer. And Kunkle can focus on maintenance if he prefers, Paxson said. After that, they'll be strongly considered for full-time work if they apply.

"I've only heard very good things about Vernon and Cameron's work ethic," Paxson said. "Everybody had very positive things to say."

Seventy-five students are signed up for the Manufacturing Academy next year, Gulley said. While not all of them will be able to do internships, Gulley and Paxson both hope the number of internships at FCC and elsewhere increases.

"We're hoping that our lead in showing that it is a possibility, that other employers will also take note and implement the program," Paxson said.

Along with more internships, the Manufacturing Academy will add robotics next year, making Jay County High School the first high school in the state to offer robotics for credit, Gulley said. Students will be able to earn a certification for FANUC robots, the type of robot manufacturers told the academy would be most beneficial for students to learn.

"There's lots of winners in this. The student, the school, the employer, the community," Gulley said. "When manufacturers in our state and in our county are successful then we're all successful."